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Zojila Tunnel Achieves Breakthrough, Set to Give Ladakh All-Weather Access

9 June 2026

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HOW

WHY IN NEWS

The **Zojila Tunnel**, connecting the Kashmir Valley with Ladakh, achieved its **final excavation breakthrough on June 9, 2026**, in a blast witnessed by Union Road Transport and Highways Minister **Nitin Gadkari**. At **13.15 km** and an altitude of about **11,578 feet**, it is set to be the **world's longest high-altitude bi-directional road tunnel**, providing safe, all-weather, year-round connectivity to Ladakh and bypassing the treacherous, snowbound Zojila Pass.

ABOUT THE TUNNEL

ATTRIBUTE	DETAIL
Length	About 13.15 km
Altitude	About 11,578 feet
Connects	Baltal (Sonamarg, Kashmir) to Meenamarg near Drass (Kargil, Ladakh)
Corridor	Srinagar-Kargil-Leh axis, National Highway-1
Executor	Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd (MEIL)
Time saved	From over 3 hours to about 15 minutes
Distinction	World's longest high-altitude bi-directional road tunnel
Full operation	Expected in about 2.5 years

The **Zojila Pass** sits on the Great Himalayan range and separates the Kashmir Valley from the Drass-Kargil region of Ladakh. It remains closed for six to seven months each year due to heavy snow and avalanches, cutting off Ladakh by road in winter. The tunnel removes that **vulnerability**.

WHY IT MATTERS: STRATEGY, CONNECTIVITY AND ECONOMY

- 1. Defence and strategic logistics.** Ladakh borders China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). All-weather road access lets the armed forces move troops, equipment and supplies year-round, a decisive improvement for border preparedness, especially after the tensions since 2020.
- 2. Connectivity for residents.** For the people of Ladakh, the tunnel ends the annual winter isolation, improving access to healthcare, markets and the rest of India.
- 3. Tourism and trade.** Year-round access boosts tourism and economic activity along the Srinagar-Kargil-Leh corridor.

THE ENGINEERING AND ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Tunnelling at such altitude through the geologically young, fragile Himalayas is a major engineering feat, contending with avalanche zones, extreme cold and unstable rock. It also raises the broader question of **sustainable infrastructure** in the ecologically sensitive Himalayas, balancing strategic and developmental need against slope stability, seismic risk and environmental impact.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Prelims

- **Zojila Tunnel:** about **13.15 km**, altitude about **11,578 feet**; breakthrough June 9, 2026
- Connects **Baltal (Sonamarg)** to **Meenamarg/Drass**; on **NH-1**, Srinagar-Kargil-Leh corridor
- Executor: **Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd (MEIL)**
- Bypasses the **Zojila Pass** (closed 6-7 months a year by snow)
- Set to be the **world's longest high-altitude bi-directional road tunnel**

Mains Angles

- 1 GS3 Border Infrastructure:** Examine the strategic significance of all-weather connectivity to Ladakh for India's defence preparedness along the LAC.
- 2 GS1 Geography:** Discuss the role of Himalayan passes and the challenges of high-altitude tunnelling in a fragile ecological zone.
- 3 GS3 Sustainable Infrastructure:** Analyse the balance between strategic infrastructure and ecological sensitivity in the Himalayas.

FACTS CORNER

FACT	DETAIL
Tunnel	Zojila Tunnel
Length	About 13.15 km
Altitude	About 11,578 feet
Connects	Baltal (Sonamarg) to Meenamarg/Drass
Corridor	NH-1, Srinagar-Kargil-Leh
Executor	MEIL
Breakthrough	June 9, 2026 (witnessed by Nitin Gadkari)
Time saved	3+ hours to about 15 minutes
Distinction	World's longest high-altitude bi-directional road tunnel

Sources: India TV, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, PIB

Source: Zojila Tunnel Achieves Breakthrough, Set to Give Ladakh All-Weather Access — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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